

# Complementary therapies & hepatitis



FACTSHEET 04

Hepatitis Council of Qld

Many people worldwide have found an increase in well-being through using complementary therapies, whether they have hepatitis or not. It is important to be informed about natural therapies if you have hepatitis, as some treatments can be very dangerous for people with liver problems.

## Choosing a natural therapist

If you decide to use complementary therapies, it's vital that you see a practitioner who is properly qualified, knowledgeable and well-experienced in working with people who have viral hepatitis. It is also advisable to continue seeing your regular doctor and/or specialist. Talk to them and your natural therapist about the treatment options and alternative treatments you are considering and continue to have your liver function tests done.

It's best if your doctor, specialist and natural therapist are able to consult directly with one another. A reputable natural therapist should be able to communicate with your GP, and have respect for the different health options available to you; to present you with the best options for your health. If a natural therapist suggests that you stop seeing your medical specialist or doctor, or stop a course of pharmaceutical medicine, *you may want to consider changing your natural therapist!*

## What should I ask a natural therapist?

- Is the practitioner a registered member of a recognised professional association for that particular therapy?
- What are their qualifications or training?
- How much experience have they had working with people with hepatitis?

- How have they measured the health outcomes of their therapy?
- How do they aim to help you?
- What risks are expected from therapy?
- Are they aware of treatments that can be harmful for people with liver conditions?
- Does this therapy interact with conventional medicine?
- What are the potential side-effects?

Remember, you have the right to ask any reasonable question of any health practitioner and expect a satisfactory answer. If you're not satisfied, shop around until you feel comfortable with your practitioner.



## What about Costs?

Some private health insurance schemes cover some complementary therapies. It pays to ask your natural therapist about costs before you visit them. Many will come to arrangements about payment, particularly for health care card holders. If you cannot afford the therapy many Schools in Natural Therapies offer free or low cost treatments with senior natural therapy students which can be an effective way to access regular treatments at a low cost.

## What sort of therapies are used?

- **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM):** consists of a combination of acupuncture, herbs, dietary change, massage and exercise aimed at creating balance in the body;
- **CH100:** is a Chinese herbal preparation often used for people with hepatitis. Although it does not clear the virus, in some cases it has decreased symptoms and normalised elevated liver function;

The ABC of Hepatitis Training Package is an initiative of Queensland Health through funding provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing under the National Hepatitis C Prevention and Education Initiative

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For more information [www.hepqld.asn.au](http://www.hepqld.asn.au)  
or Hepatitis Council of Qld info line 1800 648 491

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- **St Mary's Milk Thistle and Dandelion:** commonly used to help manage symptoms and improve liver function. Some research suggests these should be suspended during combination therapy as they may decrease the effectiveness of treatment;
- **Acupuncture:** is used to stimulate the body and energy to help clear blockages, and can also improve liver function;
- **Naturopathy:** involves restoring health through diet, exercise and lifestyle changes. It sometimes includes herbs and vitamins with the aim of improving well-being and vitality;
- **Massage or touch therapies:** are often used for deep relaxation, to reduce stress, improve circulation, improve muscle and joint pain, for chronic pain relief, to reduce blood pressure and anxiety and stimulate the immune system;
- **Meditation and Yoga:** are commonly used to reduce stress, increase focus and create a sense of peace or inner calm.

## What herbs are dangerous for people with hepatitis?

Research suggests that there are a number of herbal products which are known to cause **liver damage** and in some cases **liver failure** for people with hepatitis. These include:

- **Colloidal silver:** can cause serious liver injury and is considered toxic, with sometimes

serious and irreversible side effects;

- **Copper formulas:** have not been proven to have any health benefits, however excess copper can cause liver damage;
- **Liver cleansing formulas:** some contain large doses of Barberry which is very dangerous and highly toxic for people with hepatitis. If you buy over the counter liver cleansing formulas be sure to read all the ingredients carefully;
- **Herbal relaxation and sleep blends:** many contain high doses of skullcap and/or valerian, which are considered dangerous to people with hepatitis.

## Interested in finding out more?

### Organisations

- Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association – phone **1800 725 334**
- Australian Natural Therapists Association – phone **1800 817 577**
- Australian College of Natural Medicine – phone **3257 1883**
- Australian Homeopathic Association – phone **(02) 9713 2793**
- Dietitians Association of Australia – phone **(02) 6282 9798**
- National Herbalists Association of Australia – phone **(02) 9560 7077**

### Booklets

- Complementary and Alternative Therapies for People with hepatitis C (*Hepatitis Australia*)

### Herbs that are considered dangerous for people with hepatitis:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Barberry (<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>)</li><li>• Black cohosh (<i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>)</li><li>• Chaparral (<i>Larrea tridentata</i>)</li><li>• Comfrey (<i>Symphum officinale</i>)</li><li>• Germander (<i>Teucrium chamaedrys</i>)</li><li>• Greater celandine (<i>Chelidonium majus</i>)</li><li>• Jin Bu Huan (<i>Lycopodium serratum</i>)</li><li>• Kombucha tea (<i>Kombucha mushroom</i>)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mistletoe (<i>Viscum album</i>)</li><li>• Mixtures of valerian and skullcap (<i>Valeriana officinalis &amp; Scutellaria lateriflora</i>)</li><li>• Pennyroyal oil/squawmint oil (<i>Labiatae spp</i>)</li><li>• Sassafras (<i>Sassafras albidum</i>)</li><li>• Senna (<i>Cassia angustifolia</i>)</li><li>• White chameleon (<i>Atractylis gummifera</i>)</li><li>• Kava</li></ul> |
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